



# News Release

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## **State Superintendent Watkins Supports Greater Accountability For Charter Schools**

Michigan's Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Watkins participated as a member of the Commission on Charter Schools chaired by Peter McPherson, president of Michigan State University. Watkins did not sign the Commission's report and issues the following statements:

Charter schools have existed for eight years in Michigan. The Commission on Charter Schools has itself concluded that the jury is still out and that no definitive conclusions may be drawn regarding the impact of charter schools on student achievement. Yet, other members of this Commission recommend expanding the number of charter schools through the year 2017. To perpetuate the proliferation of charter schools without evidence of improved academic quality would be putting the proverbial cart before the horse.

I only support lifting the cap by five charter schools in 2002 and an additional 10 in 2003. Approval of additional charter schools is appropriate only after comprehensive research data provides conclusive academic results and accountability and oversight of existing charter schools have been documented.

I call on the Governor and the Legislature to fund a comprehensive research study that will be completed by the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year. The study shall evaluate the existing 189 charter schools and the academic effectiveness of these schools for the 60,000 plus students currently enrolled in them.

In 2003, there will be a new Governor and nearly a two-thirds change in the Legislature. In light of significant and imminent change, it is not prudent to tie the hands of future policy makers or to perpetuate the creation of charter schools in the absence of research that documents their effectiveness.

I fully support the accountability and greater oversight reforms that have been recommended and will be forwarded to the Legislature. The need for these reforms will be amplified and magnified when the Auditor General releases findings regarding charter school oversight later this year.

As a long time supporter of high quality public school choice, I had the lead role in creating the forerunner of charter schools in Michigan, the University Public School at Wayne State University. I also established the Detroit Center for Charter Schools at Wayne State University dedicated to helping establish charter schools and helped create the first charter school in Florida. Providing high quality choice within the framework of our public education system is necessary and valuable.

I commend President McPherson and all the members of the Commission on Charter Schools for their generous gifts of time, energy and talent to help produce this report. While I differ with the conclusions reached regarding lifting the cap on the number of charter schools, I pledge my support to enhance accountability and academic achievement for all children who attend our charter and traditional public schools.

*The Commission on Charter Schools released its recommendations at a press conference today. The Commission worked diligently over the past few months to review the current state of charter schools in Michigan and to make recommendations regarding their future. Tom Watkins was appointed by the State Board of Education almost a year ago and is committed to furthering the continual improvement of public education in Michigan. Visit the Michigan Department of Education's website at [www.state.mi.us/mde](http://www.state.mi.us/mde).*